



Housing Plan Implementation Committee

Date: August 6, 2020

Time: 6:30 PM to 7:30 PM

Location: Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Minutes

Present: Karen Kelleher, Jonathan Nyberg, Michelle Shortsleeve, Patricia Worden, Erin Zwirko.

Guests: Aram Hollman, Eric Reuss.

On the minutes from June 4, 2020, Patricia made a motion to approve the minutes as amended and Jonathan seconded the motion. Patricia, Karen, and Jonathan voted in favor of the minutes, and Michelle abstained.

The Committee then discussed the Request for Proposals (RFP) for the update to the Housing Production Plan (HPP). Erin indicated that the RFP is still a draft, as Jenny has not yet reviewed it. Erin explained that the scope of services is a basic outline of the necessary elements of an HPP per the Department of Housing and Community Development's guidelines for such documents. Erin indicated that she would particularly like feedback on public engagement.

Patricia stated that she thought much of the work could be done in house, particularly relative to collecting data and analyzing it. Patricia recommended that elements such as displacement of tenants should be discussed in the plan and recommendations on what mechanisms could be utilized to prevent such displacement such as purchases of buildings for rehabilitation and rental as affordable housing. Patricia also suggested that there be a focus on creating exclusively affordable housing. She also referenced that a discussion on tear downs and mansionization should be included.

Jonathan suggested that there is a benefit for hiring a consultant rather than having the department staff complete the work. Jonathan also recommended including a discussion on behavioral racism to be included in the HPP. He points out that there is a disconnect between what people are saying that they support housing and affordable housing, but then individual projects or zoning proposals are voted against. An outside consultant might be able to help the community see that disconnect.

Karen agreed with Jonathan's comments. Karen indicated she wouldn't second guess the department leveraging consultants to get work done. She agreed that a fair housing analysis should be included in the scope for all the reasons that Jonathan noted. She also noted that any type of housing production will take time and money, and will require compromises. This is a long term challenge, and the update could give us updated data on housing in the community. The Committee might differ on the way to get there, but she felt that all of the members could agree that more affordability in the community is needed.

Erin noted that the suggestions that have been brought up so far are certainly valid, but may be too much into the weeds for a basic RFP. Erin suggested that some of this information could be added as context to the RFP to help the consultants understand the environment that they would be working in without tying it to a specific scope item.

Patricia thought that it would be very helpful to add this context. She recommended that item 3 in the scope of services be narrowed down to just the lower range of income levels as the Master Plan specifically noted that Arlington needs affordable housing and senior housing, not higher cost housing. She noted that the zoning changes considered in 2019 that were meant to help affordable housing production depended too much on the creation of market rate units. Karen did not support the change Patricia recommended because the analysis should focus on identifying the information that can inform Arlington on what the needs are for everyone. Karen need to have a conversation on how to move the dial and limiting ourselves in some fashion does not further housing production. Jonathan also supported Karen's points, but he noted that there is analysis paralysis in the community. There needs to have some agreement on a goal and move it to forward.

Erin asked to pivot the discussion toward the amount of engagement that is appropriate for this project. Erin noted that previously there were 2 forums, a survey, and a number of focus groups, but it is an important aspect to understanding the community goals. Michelle thought that there was a real opportunity to vary the engagement or have more attendance utilizing Zoom or other meeting platforms. She recommended tying the conversation into the current discourse out there, for example, on racism and housing, might attract new attendees. Karen agreed with Michelle, and suggested encouraging the consultant to get creative in the outreach and utilize small interest groups to get into the spaces that we do not traditionally have access to.

Erin moved onto the next item on the agenda which was to give an overview of the House of Representatives' Economic Development Bill, H.4887, An Act Enabling Partnerships for Growth, and the Senate's Economic Development Bill, S.2842. Both bills received favorable votes, and are in a conference committee to negotiate the differences. In particular, both bills allow for the use of simple majority versus a two-thirds majority with some differences. The Senate bill requires a by-right multifamily zoning district within a half mile of an MBTA station or other public transportation, such as a ferry or bus terminal. The House bill does not include this mandate. The Senate bill creates a housing goal by 2040, and House bill does not set any goal. The Senate bill contains a provision to reform abutter. The bill allows courts the discretion to require a neighbor appealing a decision to approve a special permit, variance or site plan to post a bond of up to \$50,000 if the court determines that the appeal is frivolous or

lacks merit. Both the House and Senate bills create a process to appoint public housing tenants to the boards of housing authorities in towns. This language creates an appointment process to allow tenants to fill the designated board seat.

Patricia noted that it doesn't seem like there is much in either bill to create affordable housing opportunities. Karen noted that both bills create new funding opportunities for affordable housing through Housing Development Incentive Program, state housing tax credit program, and Neighborhood Stabilization Program.

Karen also noted that the House bill authorizes a local option for municipalities to enact that would allow tenants the first opportunity to purchase their building if it is put up for sale, which is an interesting opportunity and might be relevant for Arlington. Patricia noted that this is something that she has an interest in and should be part of the RFP for the HPP update.

Erin noted the dates for the upcoming meetings and offered some time for the two guests to provide any input before the meeting adjourns.

Eric Ruess, Hamlet Street, offered his support of utilizing Zoom or other similar platforms for meetings, as it enabled him to attend this meeting and many other meetings. He wanted to listen and learn and provide some thoughts. He recommended introducing small scale changes that could enable transformation.

Aram Hollman, Whittemore Street, noted that there is analysis paralysis and that the current regime is not adequate for creating affordable housing. He wonders if the update to the HPP is necessary as it doesn't seem like there has been much achieved as part of the 2016 plan. He also noted that achieving 10% affordability may never happen and the community should be purchasing units rather than relying on developers. He asked the committee to take stock of what has been done, and before spending the money, analyze what else should be done based on the 2016 plan.

Erin responded that it is true that many of the actions in the 2016 HPP have not been achieved like the 10% affordable housing is difficult for any community to reach. The plan does expire next fall, and ensuring that the Arlington maintains having an approved plan is important for the community. A piece that a consultant might be able to help us with is analyzing why we haven't been able to achieve the goals outlined in the 2016 plan.

Jonathan asked Aram how he would fund the purchase of units. Aram responded that a transaction tax on sales that would be directed to a trust could fund the purchase of units. Combine this with CDBG or CPA funds there could be some real action. He also recommended abandoning the 10% goal and try to achieve the 1.5% minimum land area threshold.

Karen agrees with Aram's initial point of buying affordable units. She noted that the Town should be doing difficult things to achieve affordability including taking risks by purchasing buildings. Finally, she noted that the 1.5% allows the town to choose its own destiny, but the town shouldn't just stop there.

Eric agreed with Aram to putting money toward efforts to increase affordable housing in the community. Eric noted that without higher density, housing prices will just go up. The town has to figure out how to do that without creating fear. There might be a middle path to use funds as an incentive to subsidize the construction and creates real progress.

Aram asked about the town engaging non-profit housing developers. Erin responded that this is part of the workplan for the committee for this year to understand why developers haven't worked in Arlington and what might bring developers to the community.

The meeting adjourned at 7:50 PM.